Advent 4—Year A
Isaiah 7:10-16
Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18
Romans 1:1-7
Matthew 1:18-25

Here we are, the 4th Sunday of Advent. We are definitely rounding the bend and headed for Christmas. All four Advent candles on the wreath are now lit. The greenery is hung. The tree is up in the Great Hall and decorations have made their way onto it.

Advent takes us on this circuitous journey, and like kids, each Sunday we ask, *"Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" "No, not yet,"* comes the reply. We had to pass through some apocalyptic landscape and hang out with John the Baptist in his wilderness for a few weeks.

But today, something shifts. We can hear it in the songs we sing. The music is filled with expectation; it puts us up on our toes; we can feel it—our end point is in sight, and we can taste that *"we're almost there"* anticipation.

And, as excited as we may feel to get to Christmas, having it now come into view may also elicit some anxiety. Six days left. Are you ready? Are all your ducks in a row, preparations complete, gifts bought and wrapped, packages mailed, food planned and shopping lists prepared, contingency plans ready if you or a family member get sick and can't travel or host a gathering?

I know that I am nowhere close to ready, not at home (thank goodness Jim's on top of it) and not here at the church. And though it's close, there is still a lot of ground to cover between here and next Saturday. It is easy to get overwhelmed at this time of year. This often shows up in the piles that start to accumulate in my office, or the clutter that seems to follow me at home wherever I go. Like Pigpen and his dust cloud, sometimes I feel like I have a little clutter cloud that follows me wherever I go. Please tell me I'm not alone here.

But the physical clutter is only the outward and visible sign of the inner clutter that can also accumulate amidst the hustle and bustle.

- What's going on in our thoughts? Are fears and anxieties, expectations and sabotaging self-talk creeping in?
- What about our bodies? Are we pushing them beyond their limits, trying to move too fast in too many directions, and finding ourselves wiped out at the end of the day?
- How about our emotions? Are they running hot? Are they shutting down? Are they on a rollercoaster?
- If we check in with our spirit, what do we find? Is it hesitant to lean into **the child conceived by the Holy Spirit, like Joseph**? Are we so filled with our preconceived ideas of what holiness and **righteousness** look like that we have **no room for Immanuel, no room for a God who truly wants to be with us**?

Forget about the outer clutter in our lives, what does our inner clutter look like?

And this is where we come to real work of this 4th Sunday of Advent, and it's laid out for us beautifully in the **Collect** for today: **Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself**…

Today is about clearing out the clutter, clearing out the clutter in our minds, in our bodies, in our hearts, and in our spirits; it's about **making space** *and* **making *ready* the space within**, so that **Jesus, at his coming, finds a spacious mansion prepared for himself**.

Now, all this preparing could feel like one more task on an already far too long to-do list, but here's the really cool thing I had never noticed until this week—the prayer starts with a plea to **God: "Purify our conscience by your daily visitation."** This isn't one more task that we've got to accomplish by ourselves; **God** is doing the cleaning, and **God** is on-board to come daily to do this work. I've had a lot of images for God over the years, but today, we get **God as housekeeper, making ready our being, preparing our being as the mansion it is, preparing our being to receive Jesus fully and wholly when he comes six days from now**.

No doubt, **God would welcome our help** in the deep clean and preparations still before us in the coming week; many hands always make light work and often provide wonderful times of communion in the process, but if you just can't see your way clear this week to *do more*, then lean heavy into trust, and know, that **God is at work within you**, every day. **God is transforming you**, and **God is making you ready**, whether you are consciously aware of that and participating, or not.

As all births make clear, **Jesus is coming whether we are ready or not**, but today, take a deep breath and take comfort in the knowledge that **God is on the clock making sure that our mansions will be more than ready to receive him and welcome him home**. Amen.

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